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Rheumatoid Arthritis

***If you are taking Vioxx to treat Rheumatoid Arthritis, [click here](#). Vioxx has been linked to the increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, and liver problems.

What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic inflammatory illness. It is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks normal tissue components as if they were invading pathogens. This illness affects about one percent of the world's population. The inflammation associated with rheumatoid arthritis primarily attacks the linings of the joints. However, the membranes lining the blood vessels, [heart](#), and [lungs](#) may also become inflamed. The hands and feet are most often affected, but any joint lined by a membrane may be involved. The inflammation can be controlled by medication. If the inflammation is not controlled the joints may become deformed.

Rheumatoid arthritis usually manifests itself over a period of a few months. However for some, the disease may appear over night. Rapid onset does not mean the individual is at greater risk of disease progression.

Rheumatoid Arthritis may have different affects on different people. Some individuals may experience extreme pain while others may not. Patients often suffer cycles of severe and light symptoms.

What are the symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis?

- joint swelling. Especially in the small joints of the hands and feet.
- joint tenderness, stiffness, and pain. Especially in the morning.

Outlook on Rheumatoid Arthritis?

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With proper treatment, many people newly diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis can prevent or delay the more disabling and feared complications of the disease.

Affects of Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Hardened Lumps. About twenty five percent of rheumatoid arthritis patients develop hardened lumps under the skin. These hardened lumps are called rheumatoid nodules. Development of hardened lumps usually develops in the later course of the disease. Often times, the nodules are found on bony sites such as elbows, hips, heels, and back of the head. However, they can also form under the skin in the finger, toe or heel pads, or in tendons.

Cartilage and bone destruction. If joint inflammation persists, cartilage and bone destruction can occur. When cartilage and bone destruction occurs, the joint becomes deformed and immobile. Inflammation and deformity are most often seen in the hands and feet. Nonetheless, the knees, hips, and shoulders may also be affected. In addition to joint deterioration, people more severely affected may also experience weight loss, low-grade fever, and malaise because of the disease's effects on the whole body.

Risk factors?

Women suffer from it two to three times more than men.

Relatives of people with rheumatoid arthritis have an increased risk of developing the disease. The siblings of severely affected rheumatoid arthritis patients are at highest risk.

How is Rheumatoid Arthritis diagnosed?

Most patients suffering from rheumatoid arthritis have antibodies called rheumatoid factors in their bloodstream that are part of the inflammatory process of the disease. The presence of rheumatoid factor is used by doctors to help confirm a diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis. However, rheumatoid factor may not be a definitive test for rheumatoid arthritis. Rheumatoid factor is also found in cases of chronic infection and in some other types of autoimmune disease. High levels of rheumatoid factor are often seen in severe cases of rheumatoid arthritis.

The diagnostic criteria of the American College of Rheumatology state that four out of seven signs and symptoms must be present for the diagnosis of

rheumatoid arthritis to be made. Symptoms such as morning stiffness and swelling should be present for at least six weeks before the diagnosis is considered certain.

How is Rheumatoid Arthritis treated?

Rest, splinting of affected joints and exercise programs. Good nutrition is also very important. It is important because patients with a more advanced disease often experience anemia and weight loss. Medication to control pain and stiffness and reduce the risk of joint deformity.

*****If you are taking the medication Vioxx, contact your doctor immediately. Vioxx has been pulled off the market because it increases the risk of heart attack and stroke.**

Good News about Rheumatoid Arthritis?

A small number of patients will go into remission, usually within the first two years.

Arthritis in the News

May is National Arthritis Awareness month in the United States.

Health Topic of the Month: Night Eating Syndrome

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